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III.—THE POLITICS OF THE GREATER ROMANTIC POETS

Political controversy and partisan feeling were intimately blended with the literature of England during what we call loosely the Romantic Period. The views of individual authors have been treated here and there by their biographers; but little attempt has been made to generalize or draw conclusions from the several political attitudes of the poets, who, tho forming no school in the strict sense of the term, were nevertheless outstanding figures in the same liberal movement in literature. Some simple conclusions, drawn from a study of these men, are presented here; and in the presentation of this material opportunity has been taken to correct a few misunderstandings which exist regarding their political relations. For convenience, the poets may be divided into three groups: the conservative yet individual men, Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge; the Old Tory, Scott; and the more or less radical trio, Byron, Shelley, and Keats. For obvious reasons little need be said of the last-named poet.

Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge may be considered together, for they show striking similarities. The most noticeable, perhaps, is an early republicanism, revealed in a sympathy for France during the early nineties. The later changes in the political feeling of Wordsworth and Southey have been traced by a number of able scholars, and it is unnecessary to retrace them here. Of Coleridge, the remark has been made, "He was never a democrat, certainly no Jacobin;"¹ and the impression seems to be

¹ Hancock, *French Revolution and English Poets*, N. Y., 1899, p. 172.

general that he was somehow less a republican in his youth than Wordsworth and Southey. This impression needs to be to some extent corrected.

In the first place, too much has been made of Coleridge's own statement in the *Friend* in 1818, when he said he had never been a convert to Jacobinical principles.² Again, a certain attitude appearing in his two addresses to the people in 1795, has apparently led Professor Hancock to declare that Coleridge took a position on the fence between the upper and lower classes, which he conceived to be divided by a "great gulph."³ Now as far as may be determined from the language he used, Coleridge did assume a difference between the orders of society, but it was a difference in general intelligence and ability to understand the intricacies of government. Such a conception was very natural and a common one in that day. Even the radical Shelley as late as 1817 saw a similar great gulph, which made universal suffrage a hazardous experiment.⁴ Coleridge's conception of society in 1795 does not prove that he was "no democrat." Indeed, he saw at this time that "truth might best be diffused among the poor by one who—uniting the zeal of a Methodist with the views of a philosopher—should be *personally* among the poor, to teach them their *duties* in order that they might be susceptible of their right."⁵

This impression that Coleridge was less a republican in his early years than the other two poets has been fostered by Dowden,⁶ who enlarges on the poet's own statement. It has also been encouraged by the biographer,

² *Complete Works*, N. Y., 1853, II, 203.

³ *Essays on His Own Times*, London, 1850, I, 12.

⁴ *Prose Works*, London, 1880, II, 296.

⁵ *Essays on His Own Times*, I, 22.

⁶ *Studies in Literature*, London, 1878, p. 12.

Brandl.⁷ The latter quotes the unpublished *Memorandum Book* of 1798—a passage which contains the following words:

To give the common people philosophic or metaphysical notions, whether of Religion or the Principles of Government, is evidently to unfit them for their proper station in the Commonwealth or State. In the different ranks of understanding or intellectual capacity there must be that of vulgar men, as well as men who are fit for public virtue and political wisdom. The one must be ruled by Superstition and by Law, the other must see the Principle upon which men are to be ruled. But to give the ignorant any power, however mediate or distant in the government of the State, is surely to depart from the broad rule of wisdom learned in the broad experience of mankind.⁸

Now a reference to the manuscript of this *Memorandum Book* in the British Museum shows that Coleridge did not write this passage down as his own view of the subject. Rather, he quoted Hutton's *Investigation of the Principles of Knowledge*, Vol. III, 548, neither indicating that he approved or disapproved the sentiment. Yet Brandl uses this as an expression of Coleridge's opinion at the time. It is possible the young poet jotted down the quotation, intending sometime to refute it. At any rate, there is no reason for accepting this as proof that he was less a republican than Wordsworth or Southey. Three years earlier he had said emphatically that Pitt's assertion—"The mass of the people have nothing to do with the laws but obey them"—was a base calumny on mankind.⁹ He opposed bitterly the Treasonable Practices Bill and the Seditious Meetings Bill of the same year. In 1796 he published his *Watchman* for the express purpose of "crying the state of the political atmosphere." He openly opposed the government, by evading the stamp tax which

⁷ *Life of Coleridge*, London, 1887, p. 226.

⁸ B. M. Addit. MS. 27901, f. 47. Reprinted in 1896. See *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen*, 97, p. 363.

⁹ *Essays on His Own Times*, I, 56.

it imposed. The *Watchman*, it should be noted, was one of the very earliest of the stamp-evading publications, the "Unstamped Press," which increased in numbers and influence until the 'thirties. Finally, in this connection, we cannot fail to note Coleridge's intimacy with John Thelwall as late as 1797.

Other selected lines from the *Memorandum Book* in the British Museum show how little Coleridge had changed by 1798, and indicate that if not a Jacobin, he was to some important degree, at least, a republican. To illustrate, take these fragmentary notes:

F. 9—"Property, intended to secure to every man the produce of his toil—as at present instituted, operates directly contrary wise to this. *Nota Bene.*"

F. 11—"Due to the staggerers that made drunk by Power
Forget Thirst's eager Promise, and presume
Dark Dreamers! that the world forgets it too."

"Preventing by their Bills the growth of the human mind—"

"British Constitution—giving quite a safe and amusing little
() for Royalty to play with."

F. 12—"Continuance of the war likely to produce an abolition of Property."

F. 13—"They teach not that to govern well is to train up a nation to true wisdom and virtue, etc. This is the masterpiece of a modern Politician, how to qualify and mould the sufferance and subjection of the People to the length of that foot which is to tread upon their necks."

"Under pretence of guarding the Head of the State, there are Bills to prevent the cutting off of an enormous wen that grows upon it."

F. 15—" 'Tis the time's plague when madmen lead the blind."

F. 19—"A state of Compulsion, even tho that Compulsion be directed by perfect Wisdom, keeps Mankind stationary—for whenever it is withdrawn, after a lapse of ages, they have yet to try evil in order to know whether or no it be good."

F. 26—"God shall cut off the spirit of Princes—he is terrible to the Kings of the Earth."

F. 28—" Like a mighty giantess,
Seized in some travail of prodigious birth,

Her groans were horrible: but O! most fair
The Twins she bare—*Equality and Peace!*”

F. 29—“At Genoa the word Liberty is engraved on the chains of galley-slaves and the doors of Prisons.”

F. 53—“By obliging everyone always to do that which to him shall seem in their present time and circumstances conducive to the public good; or by enjoining the observation of some determinate Laws, which if universally obeyed would produce universal happiness.”

The truth seems to be, Coleridge in his youth was much the same kind of republican as Wordsworth and Southey. The fact that he in later years asserted his political consistency should not be taken too seriously, for Wordsworth and Southey did the same. Altho Wordsworth signed his letter to Bishop Watson (1793) “By a Republican,” he maintained in 1821 that he had always stuck to his principles.¹⁰ It will be remembered that Southey, likewise, whatever apostacy he was accused of, always loudly declared his devotion to principle. “It is the world that has changed, not I,” he said.¹¹

A second likeness is found in the common failure of Wordsworth, Southey and Coleridge to appreciate domestic problems. All showed interest enough in questions of foreign politics, and—even in later years—unusual individuality for Tories. When France came to represent Tyranny rather than Liberty, all three turned against her, finally, with varying degrees of acquiescence, accepting the return of the Bourbons as the best solution of the international difficulty. All three, it must be noted, rejoiced at the rise of the Spanish people against the French. Southey and Coleridge, at least, opposed England’s policy with neutrals, especially America. Southey in 1823 pointed out to John Murray, publisher of the *Tory Review*, the

¹⁰ *Prose Works*, Ed. of Grosart, London, 1876, III, 268.

¹¹ C. C. Southey, *Life of Robert Southey*, London, 1850, III, 22.

folly of the warfare carried on against the young republic; and at Murray's request wrote what was the first avowed attempt to heal the wounded feelings of abused Americans—a conciliatory review of Dwight's *Travels in New England and New York*.¹²

So also, Coleridge and Wordsworth, in prose and poetry, had much to say about Liberty in the abstract, and were ever ready to direct the attention of Englishmen away from political abuses at home to affairs outside the British Isles. But on domestic matters they showed a common obstinacy and blindness, even if this attitude was modified by the personal feeling of each. Southey wrote long and impressive reviews in the *Quarterly* on matters of domestic concern, usually from the point of view of a social reformer rather than a partisan. But his remedies for the ills of suffering England were almost invariably childish and absurd. He feared to make any concessions to the Catholics because Romanism, like Dissent, endangered the very foundation of English institutions. He wanted no change in the Poor Laws which would take organized charity out of the control of the Established Church. Reform of Parliament, he believed, would be fatal to that form of government to which England owed her power and her glory.¹³ And in 1829 he said the supremacy of popular opinion was the worst evil society was threatened with.¹⁴ More laws rather than fewer were needed. "The laws, only the laws can save us!" was his jeremiad in 1817.¹⁵ First and last, his panacea for the domestic ailments of England was Christian education—in the Established Church.

¹² New Haven, 1823. Reviewed in *Quarterly*, xxx, 1.

¹³ *Quar. Rev.*, xvi, 225.

¹⁴ *Sir Thomas More*, London, 1829, I, 234.

¹⁵ *Quar. Rev.*, xvi, 511.

Coleridge, altho long professing to recognize England's guilt in the conduct of her wars against France, after his change of feeling became a strong Nationalist, as his poems indicate. In his leaders in the *Morning Post* in 1800, he showed considerable independence and liberality. Yet in the *Courier* in 1811, he wrote only of the Distillery Bill, the Bullion Question, criminal laws—regarding which his views are unimportant here—and of Irish Concessions, Reform, change in the Poor Laws, Corn Law Repeal, and free speech, all of which he really opposed at this time, altho he carefully recorded his protest in favor of Reform, conducted “judiciously and on sound principles of policy.”¹⁶ Coleridge's leaders show him at this date (1811) generally in agreement with the old line Tories, pooh-poohing abuses at home, while he urged the middle and lower classes in England to look steadfastly at foreign affairs.

Wordsworth, altho he told an American visitor in 1833 that he had given twelve hours of thought on the conditions and prospects of society to one given to poetry,¹⁷ yet had little to say about the domestic policies of his country, and when he did speak, revealed himself narrow and hidebound. On practically every live issue after the beginning of the century, he was either silent or obstructive. Often, he resorted to meaningless evasions. For instance, he saw a “deeper justice” in maintaining the severity of the cruel criminal laws in 1839;¹⁸ he praised the Oxford reformers for inspiring the age with a “deeper reverence,” before he fully understood the real trend of the Oxford movement; altho he professed to favor freedom

¹⁶ *Essays on His Own Times*, I, xxv.

¹⁷ Harper, *Life of William Wordsworth*, London, 1916, II, 385.

¹⁸ See Sonnets on Punishment by Death.

of the press, he wished for freedom *thru restrictions*.¹⁹ When in 1829 he opposed the New Poor Law Act, he did so because he thought the principle of parochial relief, administered by the upper classes, tended to elevate rather than debase human nature;²⁰ and vote by ballot, he opposed, because he believed it would *encourage* bribery and crime at the elections. These ingenious shifts always left Wordsworth in a good Tory position. He "stuck to his principles," to be sure. But somehow he managed to interpret those principles so as to support the ultra-conservative faction in politics.²¹

A third general similarity which groups these men together is their later loyalty to the Landed Aristocracy and the Church. In fact, it may be said with a large measure of certainty that their apparent or real change of political face and the obstinate convictions of their mature years are traceable to a religious bias—derived partly, it may be, from their faith in Burke.

Conscience should be the basis of policy, Southey declared in 1829.²² All the evils of society arise from lack of faith in God, he affirms in another place.²³ Again, he says, the religion of England is the great charter of her intellectual freedom;²⁴ the principle of non-conformity in religion is very generally connected with political discontent; again, nothing is more certain than that religion is the basis on which Civil Government rests.²⁵

Wordsworth was less absurd than Southey. He was a less religious man—less bound to the established and the

¹⁹ *Prose Works*, Ed. of Grosart, III, 270.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 271 ff.

²¹ See "Protest against the Ballot," *Poems*, Camb. Ed., p. 761.

²² *Sir Thomas More*, London, 1829, I, 134.

²³ *Ibid.*, I, 228.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 285.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 44.

orthodox. His movement toward conformity began in 1809 or thereabouts. In his pamphlet on the Convention of Cintra he is found conscious of a divine energy moving "in the sacred passions of a people sacrificing themselves for freedom, for home, for religion." Altho much of his conservatism on domestic affairs may be accounted for by his relations with Lord Lonsdale, yet it is probable that he welcomed Established religion more and more as a bulwark of the State. In his addresses to the freeholders of Westmoreland, he extolled the glorious constitution of Church and State, and asserted that "conscience regulated by expediency" was the basis of England's free government.²⁶

But it remained for Coleridge, the most ardent follower of Burke, to make the most of this underlying principle. Coleridge, like Wordsworth and Southey, wished to have all nations governed by the laws of individual conscience. This is the most consistent, perhaps, of all his political theories—the one which thruout his life justified his claim of political constancy. As early as 1794, his avowed opposition to England's war against France was based on religious grounds rather than immediate sympathy with the Revolutionists.²⁷ In his two Addresses in 1795, he saw religion the only means universally efficient for teaching the laborer his duty to society.²⁸ Later in life, recalling how his youthful feelings had been kindled by the general revolutionary conflagration, and then how in disappointment he had turned to pantisocratic dreams, he said, "What I dared not expect from constitutions of government and whole nations, I hoped from Religion and a

²⁶ *Prose Works*, Ed. of Grosart, I, 219.

²⁷ See *Religious Musings*.

²⁸ *Essays on His Own Times*, I, 22.

small company of chosen individuals. . . .”²⁹ But other works, especially the *Lay Sermon* of 1817, presenting the Bible as the best guide to political skill and foresight, make the attitude of his mind on this matter unmistakable. It is well known that religious prejudice prevented him from doing justice to the historians, Hume and Gibbon. From 1795, when he complained that the “Aristocratic Party” did not like a man better for his practical Christianity,³⁰ to the close of his life when he saw in the Church the last relic of English nationality, he was in this belief consistent. Religious principle was the basis of good government.³¹

Finally, a fourth trait common to these poets was a certain romantic individualism in politics; and the influence each exerted was often far from partisan. Southey in 1808 loudly declared he despised all parties. He was “of the great school of Sidney and Milton and Hutchinson. Public morality was never produced in any other.”³² But after he began earning the larger part of his living from the *Quarterly Review*, he moved—so his son tells us—closer to the Old Tory position.³³ Southey wrote many notable political articles for the *Quarterly*. In these political papers he handled the most stirring subjects of the day. But after the lapse of a century, more or less, it is easily seen that Southey was hardly ever right, especially on matters of domestic concern. He was frequently not in conformity with Tory interests, and for

²⁹ *Complete Works*, N. Y., 1853, II, 203.

³⁰ See *Athenaeum*, Sat., May 2, 1918.

³¹ *Omnia*, Oxford Ed., 1917, p. 167.

³² See C. C. Southey, *Life of Robert Southey*, London, 1850, III, 183, and Warton, *Selections from the Letters of Robert Southey*, London, 1843, II, 105.

³³ C. C. Southey, *Life of Robert Southey*, III, 182.

that reason bitterly complained of Gifford's emasculating pen. The editor was obliged constantly to cut up his articles with a "heavy and unsparing hand." Southey was often more hidebound than the Ultra-Tories whom the *Quarterly* represented; sometimes he was more liberal than the Whigs. But in spite of his vagaries, he was allowed to express his views in the *Quarterly* for many years, since he was almost indispensable as its foremost reviewer. Lockhart, the editor in 1827, summed up the whole matter in a letter to Murray when he said, "For the actual bustle of passing politics his is not the hand; but he is continually upholding that grave character and Christian philanthropy which lends effect to the sharper diatribes of mere worldly intellects."³⁴

Wordsworth was the least individual of the three. The patronage of Lord Lonsdale, so Professor Harper has shown, curbed the expression of Wordsworth's political views to the extent that scarcely anything in his poetry or prose, in later years, would indicate he was other than the most orthodox Tory of the "Ultra" faction.

Coleridge's politics were of a more individual quality during the earlier years of his career as a leader writer than later. In nearly all these newspaper essays he showed good sense and fairness, and it is well known that his contributions to the *Morning Post* in 1799-1800 gave that paper an independent flavor. In 1811, altho writing for the *Courier*, he called the reappointment of the Duke of York a national insult—certainly not a Tory view. He declared the Government more wrong that Carlisle, when in 1819 the latter was imprisoned for publishing seditious literature. At least once in later years he was found

³⁴ Smiles, *Life of John Murray*, London, 1891, II, 265.

agreeing with Brougham.³⁵ On the question of negro slavery, he held a very singular opinion; and he thought meanly of Peel, even when that statesman was in high favor with the Old Tories.³⁶ For Fox, Coleridge had many good words, until the former's negotiations with Napoleon in 1802. Altogether, in spite of the fact that the weight of his opinion was thrown with the Tory government during the greater part of his life, we may take seriously his declaration in 1811 that he was "No admirer of party confederacies in any form."³⁷ Like Southey, and to a lesser extent Wordsworth, Coleridge maintained a striking individuality in his political views; altho his statement in the *Friend* that he had never been a convert to the Jacobinical system reminds us curiously of Southey's solemn "It is the world that has changed, not I."

Walter Scott liked to believe that he, also, took an independent stand in politics, but he may be with justice regarded as a competent leader in the most reactionary camp of the Tories—the group about the *Quarterly Review*. Toward the end of his life, he asserted that from year's end to year's end he thought little about politics, except to laugh at the farce of little men swaggering in the rear of party.³⁸ Yet a study of the origin of the *Quarterly Review* shows him to have been the one person chiefly responsible for the founding of this most important Tory organ. He was not the original suggestor of the plan for this *Review* "to some men in power," as has been frequently written.³⁹ The plan of founding a Tory organ

³⁵ *Omnia*, 430.

³⁶ *Omnia*, 472.

³⁷ *Essays on His Own Times*, III, 682.

³⁸ *Journal of Sir Walter Scott*, N. Y., 1891, p. 80.

³⁹ See especially Warter, *Selections from the Letters of Robert Southey*, II, 107; *Cambridge History of English Literature*, XII, 165; and Haney, *Early Reviews and the English Poets*, Phil., 1914, xxvii.

to counteract the influence of the *Edinburgh Review* was well under way before Scott was asked by Murray to give it his support. But Scott quickly became the most important man in the little group of political conspirators. Altho there is no evidence anywhere to justify the statement made by Elliot in the *Cambridge History* that Scott "successfully pressed the editorship upon Gifford,"⁴⁰ yet his activity was none the less essential to the success of the venture. Alienated from the *Edinburgh* in 1808 by unjust criticisms of his own poems and by political articles,⁴¹ Scott threw his valuable energy into the new project. His correspondence between October, 1808, and the end of 1809, especially the letters to Gifford, Murray, George Ellis, and his brother Thomas Scott, indicate that his was the guiding hand during the critical days of the enterprise. We have only his own statement that he refused the editorship.⁴² But his notable letter of advice to Gifford (October 25), Gifford's letters to him, which indicate the editor's complete dependence on Scott during the first year or two, and Murray's correspondence, all show clearly how essential he was to the success of this momentous undertaking.⁴³ Scott was also the master strategist of the Tory camp. Since the *Quarterly* was planned to offset the political influence of the *Edinburgh*, Scott schemed to draw from the Whig periodical the first blow in the duel, and thus get the advantage of the counter blow. This maneuver was carried out successfully for a number of years in two great questions on which Whigs and Tories were at odds—war with France and the treatment of neutral nations. It was less successful as years went on.

⁴⁰ Vol. XII, 165.

⁴¹ See especially the "Don Cevallos" article, *Edin. Rev.*, XIII, 215.

⁴² Lockhart's *Life*, N. Y., 1914, II, 52.

⁴³ Smiles, *Life of John Murray*, London, 1891, I, 102.

Altho Scott did not hesitate to criticise now and then the blunders of the Tory government, and liked to call himself "constitutional" rather than partisan, he seldom revealed any such individuality of opinion as is found in Coleridge and Southey. His career in politics came to a tragic close with his bigoted utterances against Reform in 1831.⁴⁴ Altho he seems to have written no political articles himself, Scott was of all the greater Romantic poets most consistent and thoro in his conservatism, and most important in his political influence.⁴⁵

The blindness of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, and Scott to most of the abuses in domestic politics may be contrasted well with the keener interest shown by Byron and Shelley, who from the detachment of Italy could view their native land with less prejudiced eyes.

Byron's partisan contacts were shadowy and indefinite. On taking his seat in the House of Lords in March, 1809, he refused to shake hands with Lord Eldon, because he did not wish to commit himself to party. Scott believed Byron's occasional and protean democratic expressions

⁴⁴ Lockhart's *Life*, N. Y., 1914, v, 410.

⁴⁵ Scott was evidently one of the founders of the *Beacon*, a Tory newspaper started in Edinburgh in 1821, but had little to do with the management. Richard Garnett in the *Dictionary of National Biography* connected him with Theodore Hook and the founding of *John Bull*, a paper with a purpose similar to the *Beacon*—opposing the pretensions and partisans of Queen Caroline. But with the exception of a conjecture found in Lockhart's review of Hook (*Quar. Rev.*, LXXII, 75) there is no evidence that he was in any way connected with the London publication, of which Hook was probably the editor. An examination of Hook's unpublished correspondence in the British Museum, as well as the letters which passed between Scott and McVey Napier, Madden, and George Thomson, fails to throw any further light on the matter. The Letters of Lord Kinneser (William Erskine) to Scott, which must have contained much valuable information regarding his political views and activities, were destroyed (Skene, *Memoirs*, London, 1909, p. 115).

were insincere and for effect; he regarded him as a patrician on principle. And it seems true that Byron cared little for the positive, constructive, and social tendencies of the revolutionary movements in his day. He liked to pose as a democrat among aristocrats; an aristocrat among democrats. In many poems are evidences of a superficial and passing interest in the domestic problems of England. But this interest seldom led to earnest expression or to effective protest.

Of all the greater Romantic poets except Keats, Byron exerted perhaps the least influence in politics. The most we can say of him is that he was an opponent of the "Reaction." The *Quarterly Review*, most partisan of critical organs, treated him with utmost favor until the publication of *Don Juan* and *Cain*. This fact and Jeffrey's long friendship may be regarded as clear evidences that both Whigs and Tories considered his political influence unimportant, altho the Tories must often have disapproved his utterances. It must be remembered, too, that Gifford, the editor of the *Quarterly*, was Murray's reader. He saw Byron's poems in manuscript, and sometimes made omissions for political reasons.⁴⁶

Scott, at the end of a review of *Child Harold*, once took Byron to task for not figuratively dropping a wreath of laurel on Wellington's head.⁴⁷ On the whole, little notice was taken of his frequently unorthodox sentiments. After his break with the *Quarterly* Tories, Byron in *Cain* (1821) and in the *Age of Bronze* (1823) derided the policy of the Holy Alliance, and ridiculed the Landed Interests and the Church. But it was in a review of his dramas in 1822 that he was finally condemned by the Tory periodi-

⁴⁶ Moore's *Life of Byron*, London, 1830, II, 75.

⁴⁷ *Quar. Rev.*, XVI, 191.

cal, which had always before been his friend.⁴⁸ And he was condemned on religious rather than political grounds. The writer of the review was Reginald Heber.⁴⁹

A very interesting expression of Byron's liberalism is his *Ode to Venice*, in which he hails America as the home of true freedom.⁵⁰ It connects him with the outspoken, radical Shelley, who in the *Revolt of Islam*, xi, xii ff., apostrophizes this "Eagle" among nations, the home of freedom, and goes on to prophesy the remarkable growth and power of the United States in the World. Dowden has pointed out the chief value of Shelley's political views—the idea of reconstruction. Shelley was far from an extreme Radical. His biographer found in him a moderation of temper and opinion that preserved him from the views of a Major Cartwright. In 1812 he favored Catholic Emancipation in his own way, as well as repeal of the Union with Great Britain, which the Irish were not especially eager for. He believed himself hated by both parties, Oppositionist and Ministerial. In 1811 he cared not a farthing for the Radicals.⁵¹ He berated the Aristocracy in Ireland, yet acquiesced in their continued existence. In his *Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote*, 1817, the most important document we possess for determining his views, he declared Reform not practical at the time, altho desirable. What he feared most was a premature attempt at setting up a republican form of government. He opposed vote by ballot as strongly as Wordsworth did, but for a different reason—it was "too mechanical."⁵² Only those who paid direct taxes, he

⁴⁸ *Quar. Rev.*, xxvii, 476.

⁴⁹ *Murray's Register*.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Ode to Napoleon*, xix., *Childe Harold*, iv, xcvi, *Isles of Greece*, ii.

⁵¹ Dowden's *Life*, London, 1886, i, 132.

⁵² *Prose Works*, London, 1880, ii, 296.

thought, should send members to Parliament. Apparently he looked forward to a time of equality in possessions. He encouraged men to expect a vast transformation of society—a gradual change, unstained by cruelty or crime. "For the time being," he wrote Leigh Hunt in 1819, the great thing was "to hold the balance between popular impatience and tyrannical obstinacy."⁵³ And he saw no hope of more general representative government in England, until the public mind, thru many gradations of improvement, should have arrived at maturity and put away the childish symbols of monarchy.⁵⁴

One important effect of politics on Shelley and Keats is seen in the assaults of Tory reviewers, both in the *Quarterly* and in *Blackwood's*. The organs of criticism were in the hands of politicians. Southey, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, were favorably reviewed by the Tories, because of their conservatism and their relations with party periodicals. Shelley and Keats, because of their friendship with Leigh Hunt and Hazlitt, were condemned unread, and their characters as well as their poetry reviled. Even the callow Tennyson was in 1833 abused by Croker in the *Quarterly*, partly because he was somehow related to the "Cockney School."⁵⁵

The greater poets of the Romantic school held at least this conviction in common—they felt that all politics should be regulated, not by a shallow expediency such as Coleridge denounced in Pitt, but by a deeper expediency

⁵³ *Ibid.*, II, 285.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 94.

⁵⁵ As assigned in Murray's *Register*:

Review of Keats: *Quar. Rev.*, XIX, 204—by John Wilson Croker.

Review of Shelley: " " XXI, 461—by J. T. Coleridge.

" " XXVI, 168—by W. S. Walker.

" " XXXIV, 139—by J. G. Lockhart.

Review of Tennyson: " " XLIX, 81—by J. W. Croker (?).

See my *Tory Criticism in the Quarterly Review*, N. Y., 1921.

of humaneness and justice. Politics and the social order should be moralized. With the exception of Scott and Keats, each poet of the group believed this—and in his own way gave the faith expression. In Wordsworth and Coleridge, this became a profoundly religious conviction. They gradually connected it with the Established Church. Southey agreed with them, and went further than either in making loyalty to the Anglican Church the panacea for all the evils of society. Out of his love of abstract justice and human right, Shelley made a religion of his own, having found in Godwin's teachings an obstacle to faith in the Church.

In general, Romantic politics were upon an emotional basis. "What I *feel* about Spain, you know," Southey wrote to Bedford, declining to review Spanish affairs in the *Quarterly*, altho he gave the Cause his whole-hearted sympathy and good will.⁵⁶ The same impulsiveness and sincerity of emotion which made Southey, Coleridge, and Wordsworth champion in the days of their youth the French Revolutionists, later led them to rejoice in the Spanish uprising, and thruout their careers to take independent and un-Tory-like views of many questions of human welfare. Their blindness to many abuses in English domestic politics—hard to explain—was certainly not due to any callousness to human need. "With me, politics is a feeling," declared Byron, in whom, as in Shelley, the fervor of Romantic politics reached its height. Both these poets were less blind to the crying needs of the English social structure than their more conservative contemporaries, yet even they failed to put much effective protest into their poetry. Byron's championship of the frame-breakers of Nottingham,⁵⁷ his hate of Castlereagh

⁵⁶ Letter of Nov. 9, 1808.

⁵⁷ Parliamentary Speeches, *Works* (Murray), II, 424 ff.

and derisive utterances regarding the Holy Alliance, like Shelley's "Masque of Anarchy," are merely flares of emotional fire. There was no steady flame to reveal the depth and breadth of the abuses in English politics and society in that day.

If we may give our own interpretation to Coleridge's phrase—a phrase not easily expounded—we may say the Romantic poets of this group were less interested in local and temporary affairs than in "the permanent politics of human nature." In this they were obviously true poets. Most of the emotions to which these men gave utterance, the principles which they announced and remained loyal to (even tho such loyalty brought charges of inconsistency and tergiversation)—these principles are of no less value and truth today than they were a century ago. Of passing events and conditions, these poets sought to find the eternal significance. And if Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, or Shelley, appeared at times narrow, wilfully blind, or fantastically visionary and impractical, it was to a great degree because of their preoccupation with the permanent politics of human nature.

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